▲ *The participants in photographer Barbara Bordnick's New York City studio, left to right: Norma Ramos, Andrea Dworkin, Gloria Jacobs, Marcia Ann Gillespie, Barbara Findlen, Marilyn French, and Ntozake Shange*

PORNO

The last time Ms. ran a cover story on pornography was in 1985. It focused on the antipornography ordinance drafted and conceived as a civil rights law by Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon for the city of Minneapolis in 1983. The law did not pass there, but versions have been proposed in other areas of the country. And the questions raised in debates about the ordinance continue to challenge us. Is it censorship? Do we agree on the definition of pornography, its impact or significance? Would the ordinance be a boon or a blow to women's rights? Passions run deep; the issue is wrenching. Trying to get people with opposing views to come together for a discussion on pornography is not easy. Fixed assumptions, ideological disagreements and battles, bitter words and hurtful labels have strained friendships, severed alliances, and created rifts. Which is why *Ms.* is holding this discussion, to get feminists talking *to* instead of *at* each other—and listening; to get us thinking and sharing our thoughts and feelings and fears, our questions and concerns.

Where Do We Stand On

GRAPHY?

Ms.: As a reality check the editors brought magazines—ranging from *Playboy* and *Hustler* to others that were not quite as slick but far more sexually explicit. We placed them on the table and asked the participants to spend a few moments thumbing through them before the discussion began.

Marcia Ann Gillespie: Let's talk about definitions. What is pornography? Andrea?

Andrea Dworkin: Catharine MacKinnon and I wrote a legal definition for the civil rights bill that we drafted in Minneapolis in 1983. The definition goes like this: pornography is the graphic, sexually explicit subordination of women that includes one of a series of scenarios, from women being dehumanized—turned into objects and commodities—through women showing pleasure in being raped, through the dismemberment of women in a way that makes the dismemberment sexual. If men, children, or transsexuals are used in place of women, the material is still pornography.

A statutory definition has to be very concrete. But when we talk about what is pornographic in our culture, for most people that has many subjective dimensions to it.

Ntozake Shange: Pornography is the use of sex to intimidate and/or control women and children and anyone else who is subject to a situation like that. My definition would also pertain to movies of lynchings where people were having parties. It has to do with depicting something that is violent and possibly life-threatening for entertainment.

Norma Ramos: I haven't seen anything define pornography in clearer terms than the ordinance does. Outside of the legal setting, I look at pornography as a system and practice of prostitution, as evidence of women's second-class status. It is a central feature of patriarchal society, an essential tool in terms of how men keep power over women.

Marilyn French: I don't have a definition of pornography and I would be very hard put to distinguish between erotic art and pornography.

There was a time when it was very clear to me that pornography involved both the use of the body—usually a female body—and power, so that what you had in essence was sadism. Now I am not sure what human sexuality is. I am not sure to what degree normal human sexuality contains elements of power, an element of sadism.

Ramos: So many of the movements for social change in this country are very focused on creating social justice, but they tiptoe around the pornographers; they never understand violence against women. They talk about crime in gender-neutral terms, but all around us is this major sexual exploitation of women.

I began to look at that because I could no longer look away from it. And I became very sure that I would dedicate the rest of my life to ending sexual exploitation, which is exactly what pornography—in all of its forms—is to me. Some may want to defend it and call it erotica, or liberty of sexual expression, but I'm working to eliminate sexual exploitation at its core—I'm working to end prostitution.

Shange: There are two dilemmas which I've been grappling with for years. One is that part of the exploitation of people of color—especially women—has been to rob us of any inner life, to rob us of our own sexuality and our own sensuality. So I spend a great deal of my time trying to think about how I can write about intense, wonderful, creative sex among people of color without exploiting anybody and without exploiting myself. It's very hard. I hesitate to strip us of a concrete and vital language for sexual activities and desires and fantasies, because I don't think we can afford to lose too much more.

The second is that I have a great deal of difficulty understanding what people think exploitation is when I'm involved. I know it when I see other women being exploited, but I'm stunned when people think I am. A case in point that's very heavy on my heart: I was on the cover of *Poets & Writers* and I wore a pretty lace top. In the next two issues, there were letters asking if *Poets & Writers* is now a flesh magazine—why was I appearing in my underwear? Bare shoulders are exploitation now? You know, there are other things to talk about.

We have to remember that we can get people railroading each other into being very, very rigid. I'm sure that every feminist I know believes that when *we* are defining the worlds that we live in, they become richer and not poorer.

Dworkin: It's very hard to look at a picture of a woman's body and not see it with the perception that her body is being exploited, because so much happens that way in this culture. It's very difficult to draw a line

THE PANEL

Andrea Dworkin is the author of ten books, including "Pornography: Men Possessing Women." "Letters From a War Zone" (Lawrence Hill Books) is now in paperback.

Marilyn French is completing "From Eve till Dawn: A Woman's History of the World." She is the author of eight books, among them "The Women's Room" and "The War Against Women" (both Summit Books).

Norma Ramos, an attorney, is an activist in the antipornography and environmental justice movements, as well as other movements for social change.

Ntozake Shange is the author of the play "for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf." Her novel "Briliane" is due from St. Martin's Press this year.

FRENCH:

"There are pictures in these magazines in which women are making love to women; they're not hurting each other."

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY BARBARA BORDNICK

between sensitivity and hypersensitivity.

What strikes me about dealing with sexual exploitation and the whole system of pornography is that it requires such a deep process of decolonialization: women must be freed from the domination of the male system. People are frightened because they think that they're in quicksand. A lot of these questions have never been raised, especially with concrete commitments to social change. They haven't been raised with an international movement of women saying: "This is going to stop. Our question is how do we stop it?"

What you just described, that response to your photograph, Ntozake, happens in part because of the fear other women have that something bad has happened to you. Sometimes that seems almost hostile. But it comes out of a question: How do we know what this picture means?

French: We don't know and that is exactly my point. The only pornography movies I ever saw were *Deep Throat* and *The Devil and Miss Jones*. When I see what goes on in these films, I just want to leave. But there was a scene in *Deep Throat* in which a very large and very erect penis came up to the vulva. The coloring of the shot was extremely beautiful. It threw me completely. Now why shouldn't it be beautiful? Why shouldn't we all see it as beautiful? Why is it not beautiful even though that was not a beautiful movie?

Dworkin: No, it wasn't. Part of the question is, why did a woman have to be brutalized to make that film?

Ramos: I see the sexuality that's presented in pornography as extremely limiting. Andrea, you coined the phrase "eroticized bigotry."

The folks that defend pornography as free expression are actually defending some of the narrowest thinking I can imagine. When people consider the misery that it takes to make this stuff, the lives that have to be exploited and shattered to produce these images. . . . It isn't just about what you see, it's what it took for a human being to be in that position—it takes a whole lot of abuse. It takes women who have been sexually abused in childhood, who have been robbed of their self-

DWORKIN: "Dealing with sex pornography requires a

esteem, and who are vulnerable to this exploitative sexuality.

French: I've been working for ten years on a history of women. It starts in prehistory and deals with the rise of the state everywhere. In every single culture that I mention, they passed the same laws against women. They established a double standard very early on.

We are talking about 5,000 years of culture. What does this mean? There may be some of us in this room who would defend the First Amendment rather than see these magazines end—I'm one of them. But the problem is never, never going to be solved unless we start thinking about what this stuff means to men. What is prostitution about?

Censorship exists in this country. You cannot make a movie or write a book that defends the practices of the Holocaust or that exalts black slavery. But you can make a movie, any movie you like, you can write a book, any book you like, that shows any kind of torture, enslavement, or murder of women. How come?

Shange: You're right, Marilyn. We don't buy these things, and we don't go see these movies. But since I don't buy pornography it's not going to change anything if I don't use it.

So, if I come at it another way, if we unionized or organized women who work in pornography like COYOTE organizes prostitutes. . . . But then they'd get reformed and they wouldn't want to practice anymore. So it's like a revolving door. Once women learn that they can *learn* enough not to do this anymore, they stop doing it.

Ramos: I'd never subscribe to a movement whose goal was reforming slavery. You work to abolish it.

One of the most difficult things for me is exactly what you just did, Marilyn, the way you posed this notion that some of us in this room would defend the First Amendment and would be against censorship—as if there were people here who would *advocate* censorship. This movement has never advocated censorship. It advocates the elimination of sexual exploitation in all of its forms.

There are people in this room who would fight to ensure that laws against sexual harassment exist. I don't know of a sexual harassment

ual exploitation and the system of deep process of decolonialization."

situation that does not involve speech. It's most often done through words: "Sleep with me or you're fired." It's the same with racial discrimination: "The apartment has been rented already." Does that make you against the First Amendment? Does that make you for censorship? But because pornography is packaged as sexual entertainment for men, we'll tiptoe around the pornographers, we'll canonize it and call it speech. Any woman who dissents will be called a person who's against the First Amendment—which I am not.

French: That's why I say this formulation of the argument goes nowhere. Nevertheless, Andrea and Catharine's ordinance is a form of censorship. To say that it's not is also tiptoeing around something.

Dworkin: The movies that you said are *not* being made, Marilyn, *are* made—by pornographers. There is racist pornography in which the African American slave has an orgasm every time the master rapes her. Pornography sexualizes racism. There is anti-Semitic pornography in which the concentration camps are the site of sexual pleasure and the Jewish woman begs the Nazi to do medical experiments on her that were actually done to women in the camps. Pornographers are scavengers, parasites on history.

I just have to deal with the censorship thing you brought up. In the United States, censorship seems to have an ever-expanding meaning depending on who's using the word and how they're using it. In legal terms censorship has always meant prior restraint: you pass a law that stops something from being made or being done.

The notion that the ordinance does that is wrong. It is a civil law that allows somebody to bring a lawsuit after they've been injured on very specific grounds. But if the ordinance and all the political activism that women do against the pornography industry were to work, it is true that these magazines would not exist in the way that they currently exist. And many people seem to feel that if these magazines are threatened in their ability to publish, that is proof that it's censorship. But when you look at an institution of sexual exploitation, and what you want is to destroy it, you're not really talking about censorship.

The Constitution protects the magazines. It's not the speech of the women that's being protected. It's a way of making women into chattel. Who do they belong to? The pimps and the consumers of the magazines and the movies.

Ramos: We have to expand our definitions and vision of civil rights. As a woman of color who's spent a lot of time fighting to end racism, I realize that the men of color who I've struggled with on all these issues are ignoring women's issues. Women are being raped at higher and higher rates. Women are battered at rates that are just mind-boggling. Why doesn't the civil rights movement understand *that* in terms of civil rights?

Gillespie: We almost automatically speak of pornographers and consumers of pornography as "he," but there's material made by and for women.

Shange: I went to a panel in Philadelphia, and there were two women who produced pornography for women. This is supposed to be our erotica. So I looked at it and all I could figure out is that there was more of a story line and he was a little gentler with her, but I didn't get excited. If they're trying to make it for us, they haven't succeeded yet.

Ramos: The pornographers see a new market in women and so they take women who are still a part of the industry and call them makers of "erotica." When you look at what's being done and you look at the context, there's no difference. The conditions that produce pornography—and we have upward of a $10 billion-a-year industry in this country—are hostile to the production of real erotica. In the terms that we're talking about, you need equality for women to produce life-affirming sexuality.

French: There are pictures in these men's magazines in which women are making love to women; they're not hurting each other. This is a situation of equality. It's upsetting because of what has been done and the way they're holding their bodies.

Dworkin: But they're *not* making love to each other. There's a social relationship between the photograph and the consumer. So-called lesbian layouts in heterosexual male pornography provide two women for the male consumer. What you see are the orifices of their bodies turned for his sexual pleasure.

French: I know that, but how can you say, "You can't do this"?

Dworkin: I'm not saying that.

French: In the ordinance you say "demeans, degrades." There's nothing in those films or pictures that's sadistic. How do you describe it? How do you stop it?

Dworkin: In this law, part of the definition of pornography is that it turns women into commodities, puts women in postures of sexual submission to be dominated by men. You have two wires that have to be tripped under this law. One, the material has to fall under the definition, and two, something has to have happened so that, for instance, the woman is forced to make pictures even if there is no violence in the pictures. You didn't see any in *Deep Throat,* but an enormous amount of violence

RAMOS:

"What if racism had been turned into sexual pleasure the way that the oppression of women has been?"

was used to make the picture.

The pornographers make a product. And the way that the product is made depends on women being vulnerable enough—by being hurt as children, by being poor, by being homeless—to be brought into prostitution and to be involved in pornography.

The mind-set has to change. It's not a question of looking at a magazine and censoring the content. It's a matter of looking at the social reality, the subordination of women necessary to create the magazine, and the way that the magazine is then used in the world against women.

But now we're dealing with a technological change too. Because of film and photography, the pornography industry requires the use of real people, endless new batches of young women. And that's the future that we're leaving for our children, in the name of freedom of speech, or in the name of sexual liberation.

Gillespie: Norma, you said there can be no erotica, as long as patriarchy exists. Am I clear?

Ramos: I'm saying the social conditions that are favorable to the production of pornography are hostile to the production of erotica. You need equality for women and you need a vision of human sexuality that is life-affirming. Those conditions do not exist. That doesn't mean that some mind, somewhere, could not create something that would be erotic.

Gillespie: I'm still intrigued about the images that women are making, for example, lesbian pornography.

Shange: I've gotten letters from people who say that my work is profane and abusive to black people and to women. I'm sure the reason they say that is because I'm taking words that men have used to make us dirty. I'm taking them to make us able to use them any way we choose, or showing how, when we use them the way men do, we hurt ourselves. There is a piece that I do called "Crack Annie" where the woman gets all involved with her boyfriend to supply her habit, and he won't give her any drugs unless she gives him her little girl, so she does. And she refers to herself and her little girl as either his pussy or her pussy to be given away and taken, like you're go-

ing to get a a piece of gum or something. That was done to show the disassociation and lack of value—not realizing one's own vulnerability, not knowing when we hurt.

I can get myself in a big bind and never be able to write anything that is honest if I can't somehow uproot words or images that have been malignant and make them constructive for me.

French: The entire discourse about sex has been created by men. There's nothing we can do about it. Either we use their words or we avoid them. It's like anything we do in feminism—what we face is a long wall of closed doors. And all we can do is bang on them and open them a little bit.

Dworkin: I see my writing as a series of assaults on male culture, and as a way of destabilizing male control over women. On your question about the lesbian pornography, Marcia, from my point of view, they are reifying the status quo. I think that there's a difference between trying to explode the discourse, trying to bring new light to it, versus simply imitating it. And I think lesbian pornography is extremely male-identified.

French: But do we have a female model? Do we have an image of ourselves? I don't think we do.

Ramos: Well, that's one of the tasks that we have before us. But there's no distinction between what lesbian pornographers are doing and what these women who are fronting for the pornography industry are doing. It is not anything that is going to advance us as women.

They may package it as art, or say that they are introducing a new vision. But it is sexual exploitation. The pornographers have a lot to gain by fusing the two, by saying, "It's in the eyes of the beholder."

French: I have to say that I have really learned something from you today. In the male world things stand on pedestals and are sacrosanct—art, mathematics, government. And these things may not be questioned and are worth any sacrifice. What the three of you are saying in your different ways is that no, nothing's on a pedestal. There's art and there's government and there's mathematics and there's feeding children and there's housing the homeless and all of these things are equally important. No one of them is sacrosanct. And they are all subordinate to the one important thing: the well-being of the human race.

Gillespie: But were does female sexual pleasure and female sexual fantasy play out here?

Shange: I write about it. I write fantasies and dreams constantly.

Gillespie: You are exploring erotica.

Shange: Oh, absolutely, I hope so. I do it because I don't like things being kept from me as a woman. That's why I started writing: I didn't like anything kept from little brown girls. Our lives are kept from us and our dreams are kept from us. No one ever told me anything like this and I know I'm not the first colored woman who had dreams.

When I read my work in public places I get rapt attention from the women, but the men giggle or stare at me like they wish I'd disappear. I don't know—is it because the pleasure isn't from what her partner is doing but from the sensations her body is actually experiencing? We don't have novels that tell us how my body felt when so and so made love to me. We need to do that, so that, eventually, we'll have a multiple kind of vocabulary just like we have multiple orgasms.

Dworkin: One of the disgraceful things that the pornography industry does is that it takes the word "fantasy" and robs it of its meaning. For instance, if a man uses a prostitute, he calls it a fantasy. The society is willing to let him do that, but something has actually happened, a transaction has taken place, somebody has done something to someone. That's not a fantasy, that's a social relationship that has to do with power and, presumably, with someone's pleasure, usually his.

I spent a lot of years out on the streets, prostituting at different times, a lot of times homeless. I don't come to this subject from a middle-class abstraction about these words. While there's been a great deal of sexual pleasure in my life, I also became aware, very early, that sex is a medium to convey hostility and antagonism and ownership and control and outright hatred.

So when people insist that women talk about sexuality in terms of pleasure, it's almost a demand that constricts the discussion. We're always supposed to prove that we're for or against sex. Male writers have a tremendous range of ambivalence about sexual experience. They express a lot of antagonism, a lot of hostility, a lot of anger—all kinds of deep complex emotions. But women are supposed to say yes or no. And we're being judged according to whether our answer is the right one.

Ramos: Men are getting sexual pleasure from our subordination. What if racism had been turned into sexual pleasure the way the oppression of women has been? When you struggle against that oppression, the opposition stands up and says, "No, you are fighting against my pleasure." A very big piece of that is learned behavior, and in our society it's socialized by the pornography. Even if you're not directly consuming the pornography, you're getting those images through advertising and movies.

French: I used to teach creative writ-

SHANGE: "We have to remember that we can get people railroading each other into being very, very rigid."

ing and one time a young woman in the class read two paragraphs she had written. By the time she finished, the class was gasping with erotic delight. They were filled with desire. You didn't realize until the very end that she was talking about peeling an orange. It had nothing to do with the body—it was peeling, smelling, tasting, juice, it just went on like that. Now, I call that women's erotica. So there's a possibility for it, but there's just so much fruit in the world.

Gillespie: There does seem to be an assumption here that female sexuality is inherently kinder, gentler.

Dworkin: That critique has been coming from a certain part of a certain women's subculture—the notion that dangerous, hard, cruel sex is real sex. And those of us who have different experiences and notions of eroticism and sensuality are quite simply dismissed. The pejorative word having been, for a while, "vanilla," which is, ironically, one of the most sensual aromas.

We have been treated with such contempt for valuing a wider eroticism, for not having a fetishized and alienated view of sexual function, for not having a brutality-based view, for not honoring power differentials. We're treated as if it's some kind of reassertion of Victorian values and has something to do with a view of women as frail.

Gloria Jacobs: But what about the possibility that some women are saying: "We enjoy certain kinds of sex that have power differentials, but it's not sadistic, and we don't want to be attacked for it. We don't want to have our sexuality negated because we probably can't change how we feel about sex in our lifetime."

Dworkin: If that is the kind of sexual experience you want in this world, you're going to get it. If what you want is something different, you're living in a world that you've got to find a way to change. The way that argument has always come at me has been that if I'm going to make the people that you're talking about happy, I have to stop writing. They're saying: "What you write makes us so unhappy about what we're doing that we can't coexist. So you shut up."

Ramos: Sexuality is socialized. They did not get their pleasure principles by accident. I understand what you're saying: they're in this place. But if people are in a place that is about taking sexual pleasure from scenarios that involve abuse. . . . Pedophiles don't want to stop doing what they're doing either.

Jacobs: I'm not talking about abuse. There's a middle ground that isn't about peeling oranges but is not about abuse . . .

Ramos: But what I'm saying is that women are socialized into actually getting sexual pleasure through their powerlessness. And it's very hard to opt out of this socialization. So I understand your question speaks to this reality. It's a struggle that a lot of us wage personally. Here I am in this place and I'm getting sexual pleasure from this, so what do I do about this? You work to change that. You have to challenge it. Do you want to stay in that place, or do you want to open up the possibility that maybe human sexuality doesn't have to be this limited, this brutal?

French: I seriously doubt that anybody can change their sexuality.

Dworkin: Oh, people can.

French: I never denied that a person can change their sexual behavior. But I think you can't change your sexual fantasies.

Dworkin: But they do change. As your life changes your fantasies change.

I've experienced it, other people have experienced it. I'm not telling people what they have to think or what they have to feel, but I am saying that change is a part of life in the sexual realm as it is in every other realm.

Gillespie: Both Norma and Andrea see this as a civil rights issue. Do you agree, Ntozake?

Shange: I think that it's a dilemma we've been confronting with men of color all through the twentieth century, which is, regardless of how oppressed they are, they still get some goodies for being a male. And until they're ready to move away from that for our sake, if not for their own unconscious desires to be full human beings, then we're not going to be able to do anything with them. And we have to proceed as if it's not going to happen, because otherwise we get stalled, too.

Gillespie: What about the ordinance?

Shange: I would love to see the ordinance passed in Philadelphia where I live. People are going to say this is for the cities. It's not just for the cities. It's for the malls and the residential neighborhoods and the

truck stops and tourist places. But I think there should also be a retraining and reeducation package for sex industry workers who need to be directed into other careers.

French: I guess I'd like to see the ordinance tried. But I don't trust the government. Censorship has to be backed by the government—the same government that showed sadistic, pornographic movies to the pilots who were going to bomb Iraq the next day. This government is going to uphold our freedom?

Maybe the ordinance—which is after the fact rather than before, and therefore not censorship, as you say, and would be in the hands of local authorities—might work. Not that I trust local authorities, either.

Dworkin: It would be in the hands of women. Somebody would have to bring a lawsuit. There's no police enforcement of any kind. It will go into the courts; that's where the government becomes a part of it. But in terms of enforcement, a person initiates it because her civil status has been hurt.

It places women in a different place inside the legal system. If it were used, it would have a tremendous impact on the way the legal system sees and treats rape victims, the way the legal system sees and treats women and prostitution. It's the first thing that says: "If these things have been done to you, that doesn't make you nobody. You get to be somebody under this law. Your life matters. We're going to try to give you back some part of it."

Ramos: I've heard that before: "I don't trust the government so we'd better not do anything on pornography." Well, we don't trust the government, but we have other civil rights laws.

French: The government is not going to use a sexual harassment law to keep me from publishing a novel, but it could use an antipornography law.

Dworkin: The obscenity laws can already be used against you. I think they should be repealed.

Ramos: I think censorship helps pornography flourish; the laws should be repealed. Let's have some power in the hands of women and then we'll have some real political discussion about censorship and sexual exploitation. **Ms.**

PORNOGR

Does Women's Equality Depend

JEWELLE GOMEZ
Novelist, member of the National Coalition Against Censorship

I see pornography as an indication of our low value in this society, but I don't think the elimination of porn is the key to our equality, partly since no one can define what porn is. Some people would say the key to women's equality is the elimination of television.

It's very important to educate men and women about the validity of sexual desire and erotic images. Pornography is not just images of women. It's also images of women and women and men and men. Until everyone gets a big education, the negative images in porn will always take precedence because this country is so erotophobic.

You can't legislate the erotic impulse; just like sex is messy, the legislation is messy. The people who end up being slam-dunked first are those on the margins—people like me, a lesbian. The legislative approach is a lazy approach. The idea that that's the only approach is a male way of thinking about problem-solving: you grab your point, you go straight for it, and everything else be damned. The leap to legislation trivializes the real issues. I think porn is Bud Lite commercials, quite frankly. It's men on the street harassing women and women finding that acceptable. That's not *caused* by pornography. Porn reflects what's already going on.

When I was growing up, a national Catholic newspaper listed things that would be a sin to watch on TV. I find it equally infuriating that women should give that same power to a bunch of white men who haven't proven their allegiance to me as a black person and a lesbian.

The percentage of people who even use porn is very low. Violence is a much bigger issue. Porn just reflects the violence. And as Audre Lorde said, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."

MARI MATSUDA
Law professor, coauthor of "Words That Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment"

Ending gender-specific violence is a prerequisite to gender equality. If you believe, as I do, that violence against women is intertwined with the production of pornography, then the struggle against pornography is part of the struggle for equality. I have a concern that there now exists a pornography that multiplies forms of oppression, targeting women of color, lesbians, or children, for example. Anti-hate-crime activists in the Asian American community have identified hate rapes in which the rapists specifically target Asian women. There is a genre of pornography that promotes this sexualized, racialized violence.

We need to get away from male-centered notions of free speech. The traditional First Amendment analysis ignores the effect of power and wealth differentials. Women do not now have access to effective speech. We should demand it and at the same time say that pornography, sexual harassment, racist speech, gay-bashing, anti-Semitic speech—speech that assaults and excludes—is not the same as the forms of speech deserving protection. Why is it that pornography, which undermines women's equality, is singled out for absolute protection? When it comes to violence against women, people say, "Yes, that's a problem, but we have to have freedom of speech."

Dworkin and MacKinnon are on the right track because they are trying to distinguish between pornography and other types of expression that should remain protected. This follows the sexual harassment model. If people are saying things to you at work because of your gender, and this is making it impossible for you to do your job, we call that discrimination, not free speech.

I also want to express solidarity with artists like Dorothy Allison and Karen Finley, who use their art to reveal women's oppression. These

APHY ?

On What We Do About It !

artists legitimately fear censorship because some people can't tell the difference between dissent and assaultive speech. I think we are capable of discernment, and that is our challenge as feminists—to tell the difference.

HOLLY HUGHES
Performance artist, member of the NEA Four (artists who sued the National Endowment for the Arts, charging their grants were inappropriately denied)

Pornography is a term that's loosely used to cover a range of images. I have strong feelings about the relationship of images to action. That's not to say that I don't think images and speech can reflect and condone prejudice and bigotry. But I don't see imagery—whether it's pornography, hate speech, or lesbian imagery—as *causing* a certain kind of behavior.

If you argue that getting the *Playboys* out of the 7-Eleven is going to drive down the rape rate, then you also have to give credence to the religious Right's claims that representations of gay and lesbian lives are going to cause homosexuality.

Not all porn is created by men using women for men. There are many women who choose to use and participate in porn, and that's not an act of self-abuse. It can become a tool to discover your own sexual power. I'm a consumer of pornography. That doesn't mean that I'm going to go out and do everything I see.

To be anticensorship doesn't mean that you are not offended. But the antidote to speech that you find disturbing is more speech. Of course images reinforce stereotypes and bigotry in the culture. But I'm disturbed by efforts to empower women—or any other group that has been shut out of full participation—that are limited to discussing imagery. We need better ways to empower victims of abuse and violence. Restrictions on speech will end up being controlled by the people who are most powerful in this society. In Canada, due to a law that *Ms.* supported, they have been seizing lesbian, gay, and feminist literature.

In 1989, Congress passed for the first time restrictive language connected to National Endowment for the Arts funding. The language stated that art could not be funded that might be considered obscene, and "homoeroticism" was stated as one definition of obscenity. As an artist under attack I received death threats for the explicitly lesbian nature of my work. In this, the most censorious period since McCarthy, when the term "pornographer" is being used to silence people as "Communist" was then, I hoped that prominent feminists and institutions like *Ms.* and NOW might protest or at least join the debate. Instead there has been a huge deafening silence that I have found not only painful but complicitous. It makes me question if the antiporn feminists' definition of obscenity is any different from Jesse Helms's.

EVELINA GIOBBE
Founder, WHISPER (Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt)

I don't separate pornography from prostitution from the strip circuit. Systems of prostitution are intertwined and come in both legal and illegal forms, by which men can buy unconditional access to women and children. The existence of the sex industry is directly connected to women's subordination in the patriarchy. Can we transform women's lives by doing away with rape? Not completely, but it would make life easier. The same goes for pornography, prostitution, and stripping.

The way we allow men to treat prostituted women sets the standard by which all of us can be treated. Pornography is the ultimate recycling bin of prostitution. You can buy any piece of my young womanhood in the marketplace and yet I can't activate any legal remedy. I cannot have any kind of redress for the pornographic materials that were made of me.

AN EXCERPT FROM MODEL ANTIPORNOGRAPHY CIVIL RIGHTS ORDINANCE

DEFINITIONS

1. "Pornography" means the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures and/or words, including by electronic or other data retrieval systems, that also includes one or more of the following:

Women are presented dehumanized as sexual objects, things, or commodities. Women are presented as sexual objects who enjoy humiliation or pain; or as sexual objects experiencing sexual pleasure in rape, incest, or other sexual assault; or as sexual objects tied up, cut up, mutilated, bruised, or physically hurt. Women are presented in postures or positions of sexual submission, servility, or display. Women's body parts—including but not limited to vaginas, breasts, or buttocks—are exhibited such that women are reduced to those parts. Women are presented being penetrated by objects or animals. Women are presented in scenarios of degradation, humiliation, injury, or torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised, or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual.

2. The use of men, children, or transsexuals in the place of women is also pornography for purposes of this law.

CAUSES OF ACTION

It is sex discrimination to: (1) Coerce, intimidate, or fraudulently induce any person into performing for pornography, which injury may date from any appearance or sale of any product(s) of such performance(s). The maker(s), seller(s), exhibitor(s), and/or distributor(s) of said pornography may be sued for damages and for an injunction, including to eliminate the product(s) of the performance(s) from the public view. (2) Force pornography on a person in any place of employment, education, home, or any public place. Complaints may be brought only against the perpetrator of the force and/or the entity or institution responsible for the force. (3) Assault, physically attack, or injure any person in a way that is directly caused by specific pornography. Complaints may be brought against the perpetrator, and/or the maker(s), seller(s), distributor(s), and/or exhibitor(s) of the specific pornography. (4) Defame any person through the unauthorized use in pornography of their proper name, image, and/or recognizable personal likeness. (5) Traffic in pornography—to produce, sell, exhibit, or distribute pornography, including through private clubs. 5a This section applies only to pornography made using live or dead human beings and/or animals. 5b Isolated parts shall not be the basis for complaints under this section. 5c Any woman may bring a complaint as a woman acting against the subordination of women. Any man, child, or transsexual who alleges injury by pornography in the way women are injured by it may also complain.

The MacKinnon/Dworkin ordinance would have allowed a modicum of relief for women who have been used in porn. It wouldn't have brought an end to the empire.

CAROL ANNE DOUGLAS
Staff member, "off our backs," a feminist newspaper

Porn and women's status are connected, but the issues of violence against women and the portrayal of women in the media are broader than porn. I think there are several possible approaches to analyzing porn. The ordinance is one. It would be interesting to see what would happen if that were enacted somewhere. But I think that education is important. I understand the concern with relying on the courts because the laws are misogynist.

There should certainly be concern about the women who are used in making pornography. But it's terrible that there has been such great division over this in the movement. I don't know the best way to respond, but I think it's crucial to see the broadest possible picture of violence against women and to see pornography as related to that. I don't want to say whether there is a causal relationship between pornography and violence, but I think there may be.

RITA MAE BROWN
Author of the forthcoming novel "Dolley: A Novel of Dolley Madison in Love and War"

Pornography exists for the lonesome, the ugly, the fearful. Repulsive as it may be to many women and not a few men, it's made for the losers. It's probably the only time the poor fellows feel powerful.

Laws are only obeyed by people who believe in them. You've got a lot of laws against drugs. Has it stopped anyone? Until both men and women understand the cause of pornography as well as other sexist acts, you aren't going to change much. The cause was, is, and always will be the fear of female power in every sphere of life, including sex.

Women's equality depends not on what we do about pornography, but on how intelligently we fight for access to money and political power. Pornography is an educational sideline for us, allowing us to see the hidden side of our foes. In a way, it's a gift because they reveal so much about themselves. You win a war by knowing your political enemy inside and out.

On a personal note, what amazes me about so much of the pornography one can rent at a video store is how unintentionally funny it is.

LEANNE KATZ
Executive director, National Coalition Against Censorship

Is pornography an issue involving women's equality? The answer is yes. But women can't achieve equality through repression. Feminism does not set freedom in opposition to equality. We must have both.

Charges of "pornography" are used by the Right to attack sex education, AIDS education, Judy Blume novels, and *Ms.* magazine. As feminists we must use all media to examine feminist issues, to do our analysis, and to speak out about

what we see as well as to use it positively, for our own expression. There is a terrible danger in directing our criticism at words and pictures about sexuality. Women's sexuality and its expression—both the reality of it and information about it—have always been suppressed.

KATHLEEN BARRY
Executive director, Coalition Against Trafficking in Women

Porn functions on several different levels: as a particular abuse of women, as an ideology of masculine power, and as hate propaganda. It's the graphic depiction of patriarchy's view of women. It is not only sex inequality and discrimination, but it is a major force in the oppression of women—nationally and globally.

I have been working on international human rights law to make all sexual exploitation a violation. Sexual exploitation is any condition where there is gain—financial or otherwise—through the use and abuse of sexuality. That is a violation of human rights. A proposed United Nations treaty against sexual exploitation does not take U.S. law as its model. It is designed to relate to any given national situation. In the U.S., the MacKinnon/Dworkin ordinance is one major approach to confronting exploitation.

LANI KA'AHUMANU
Co-coordinator, BiNET USA, the national bisexual membership organization

"Porn" is a buzzword. It's charged and confusing and divisive. A friend uses the term "erotomisogyny"—that is what pornography is for me, the eroticization of hatred of women.

As the coordinator of BiNET's HIV project for lesbian and bisexual women, I am worried that the sexual hysteria of the religious Right is linked so closely with the antiporn women's movement. In my work, we have educators who role-play safe sex techniques. Some women from the antiporn movement could see that as porn—as could Jesse Helms. For women to incorporate safe sex into our lives we have to deal with sexuality without judgment.

CAROLE VANCE
Editor of the anthology "Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality"

I see the most useful question as: What's our vision for women's sexuality? I think an imaginative and comprehensive agenda on sexuality that aims at equality has to be committed to expanding women's pleasure as well as reducing the danger they face. To reduce that complex and ambitious agenda to the issue of pornography is a big mistake.

Porn should be criticized along with images in the Bible, in textbooks, and in women's magazines. When our criticism of sexist representation skews to pornography, our strategy is distorted. Why is sexism in sex worse than sexism anywhere else? In a utopian future you would expect sexist imagery to undergo a change. But to overstate the connection between sexist sexual imagery and women's equality is to interfere with the discussion we need to have about sex. It's also pandering to a dangerous political climate. Every right-winger agrees that porn leads to women's inequality—an inequality that doesn't bother him in any other way.

BARBARA FAYE WAXMAN
Expert in disabled women's sexual and reproductive health

In the mid-1980s, Congress attempted to prevent the Library of Congress from publishing *Playboy* in braille. In the late 1980s, *Playboy* had its first photo spread of a disabled woman, Ellen Stohl. She was photographed partially nude; the disabled parts of her body were either covered or not shown. Her wheelchair was never included. When asked why, Hugh Hefner said they didn't want to appeal to those men who feel a "kinky" attraction to disabled women—suggesting it is a sexual perversion to desire or make love to a disabled woman.

These two incidents reflect a long history of disabled people's sexual oppression. We have been prevented from forming families, getting married, maintaining child custody, birthing and rearing children—and from controlling the information that enables us to achieve sexual and reproductive freedom. So the last thing I'm going to do is call for any form of censorship that will inevitably have a backlash and reinforce the policies and practices that have kept disabled people sexually disempowered for so long.

We need a movement that steers pornography away from male rage and objectification and begins to emphasize desire, pleasure, and love. Disabled women's voices must be very loud in that evolution from pornography to erotica. The voices of Dworkin and MacKinnon and like-minded thinkers are important also, if only to bring pornography into some zone of safety. Ms.

—Interviews by Sally Chew

What do you think?

We'd like to hear from you, the readers of "Ms.": Does women's equality depend on what we do about pornography? And what, if anything, should feminists do to address the use of women in making porn? Send letters to: "Ms.," Pornography Discussion, 230 Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10169.